

SENATE BILL 553

By Harper

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15,
relative to Emancipation Day in Tennessee.

WHEREAS, on August 8, 1863, prior to implementation of President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in East Tennessee, Andrew Johnson, seventeenth president of the United States and then military governor of Tennessee, freed his slaves in the area of Greeneville, Tennessee, located in Greene County; and

WHEREAS, the African American community in the vicinity of Greene County soon began to hold annual celebrations on August 8th, known as the "Eighth of August Celebration" and "Emancipation Day" which celebrations are documented at least as early as 1875, in *The Greeneville American*, and over one hundred years ago in *The Greeneville Herald* and *Knoxville Sentinel*; and

WHEREAS, "Emancipation Day" has been observed in several neighboring states, including Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Missouri, evidencing the great interest and enthusiasm for "Emancipation Day"; and

WHEREAS, the tireless research and organizational efforts of the African American Task Force of the Community Economic Development Network of East Tennessee have produced much of the documentary sources related to the history of "Emancipation Day" and a special conference in Greeneville, Tennessee entitled, *Oh Freedom: Reclaiming August 8th as Emancipation Day*; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee counties of Carter, Cocke, Greene, and Knox have all issued proclamations designating August 8 as "Emancipation Day"; now therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15, Chapter 2, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

§ 15-2-111.

August 8 of each year shall be observed as "Emancipation Day," to be proclaimed as such by the governor, to honor and recognize the celebration of the action of Andrew Johnson in freeing his personal slaves on August 8, 1863, and the significance of emancipation in the history of Tennessee. This day shall not be a legal holiday as defined in § 15-1-101.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.